

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EUR-12 IO-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01

INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02

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P R 311128Z DEC 74

FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1828

INFO USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSYLONDON

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

S E C R E T KUWAIT 5523

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT KU IZ IR

SUBJ: IRAQI-KUWAIT FRONTIER DEVELOPMENTS

REF: KUWAIT 5212 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: KUWAITI AND IRAQI PROCLIVITY TO THUMB NOSES AT EACH OTHER, AND STEPPED UP MILITARY ACTIVITY IN IRAQI-KUWAITI BORDER AREA ARE CAUSES FOR SOME CONCERN. MISCALCULATION BY KUWAITIS OR IRAQIS WHO WOULD LIKE TEACH EACH OTHER A LESSON CANNOT BE RULED OUT, AND ANY ACTIVE IRANIAN CONCERN (OF WHICH BRITISH HAVE SOME EVIDENCE) WOULD OBVIOUSLY ADD NEW DIMENSION. SITUATION AT HEAD OF GULF IS CALM AT PRESENT BUT CONTAINS UNHEALTHY ASPECTS THAT DESERVE CONTINUED CLOSE WATCH. END SUMMARY

1. IRANIAN AMBASSADOR ZANFARD CALLED DEC 30 TO CHECK WITH ME NUMBER OF REPORTS HE HAD BEEN RECEIVING OF NEW IRAQI INCURSIONS INTO KUWAITI TERRITORY (ALLEGEDLY UP TO SIX KILOMETERS

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FROM PREVIOUS TWO), KUWAITI TROOPS AND EQUIPMENT MOVING NORTH-

WARD TO BORDER AREA. AND SOME SORT OF KUWAITI ULTIMATUM GIVEN TO IRAQIS TO WITHDRAW FROM KUWAITI TERRITORY. I TOLD ZANDFARD I DOUBTED ACCURACY OF SOME OF THIS INFORMATION AND THOUGH HIS REPORTS MUCH TOO ALARMIST. I ADDED THAT WHILE SENIOR GOK OFFICIALS HAD INDICATED TO ME CONCERN AT LONG-RANGE IMPLICATIONS OF PERIODIC TENSIONS ALONG BORDER, THEY DID NOT APPEAR TO BE EXPECTING IMMEDIATE, ACTIVE TROUBLE.

2. I SUBSEQUENTLY WENT TO SEE BRITISH AMB LAMB WHO SAID HE HAD RECEIVED TELEPHONE CALL LATE PREVIOUS EVENING FROM BRIT AMB IN TEHRAN INFORMING HIM IRANIAN FONMIN HAD ASKED IF HE KNEW OF TROUBLE BREWING ON IRAQI-KUWAITI BORDER. LAMB SAID HE HAD SENT "CALMING MESSAGE" TO TEHRAN AND LONDON. HOWEVER SITUATION REQUIRED CAREFUL MONITORING. LAMB THEN CALLED IN COL. PLATTS-MARTIN, CHIEF OF KUWAIT LIAISON TEAM (BRITISH MILITARY MISSION IN KUWAIT) AND CHIEF MILITARY ADVISER TO GOK ARMED FORCES. PLATTS-MARTIN MADE FOLLOWING POINTS:

A. DURING LAST MONTH OR SO CHRONICALLY UNEASY CALM ALONG IRAQI-KUWAITI BORDER HAS BEEN DISTURBED BY SEVERAL MINOR INCIDENTS, E.G. LANDING OF IRAQI HELICOPTER IN DISPUTED TERRITORY FROM WHICH, KUWAITIS CLAIM. RUSSIAN AS WELL AS IRAQI OFFICERS DEBARKED FOR BRIEF LOOK AROUND; IRAQI QUESTIONING OF KUWAITI BULLDOZER OPERATORS WORKING ON A ROAD IN AREA; AND IRAQI REQUEST (KUWAITIS SAID) FOR PERMISSION EXERCISE TROOPS ON KUWAITI SIDE OF BORDER. (KUWAITIS SAY THEY REFUSED). KUWAITI JITTERS AND EMOTIONALISM ALSO FURTHER KINDLED BY RECENT COMMENT IN LOCAL PRESS BY PROMINENT KUWAITI EDITORIALIST (REF KUWAIT 5177) ACCUSING GOK IN EFFECT OF BEING TIMID IN FACE OF IRAQI PROVOCATIONS. PLATTS-MARTIN BELIEVES THERE IS SIGNIFICANT ELEMENT IN KUWAITI MILITARY WHICH SUPPORTS THIS VIEW.

B. KUWAITI BULLDOZERS ARE AT WORK ON CONSTRUCTION OF EAST-WEST ROAD BETWEEN IRAQI AND KUWAITI MILITARY POSITIONS. KUWAITIS SAY ROAD IS WELL WITHIN KUWAITI TERRITORY AND MARKS LINE SOUTH OF WHICH IRAQI FORCES WILL NOT BE PERMITTED TO MOVE.

C. KUWAITIS HAVE PLANNED TWO SEPARATE BUT RELATED MILITARY OPERATIONS. ONE IS DEPLOYMENT OF 50 CENTURION TANKS, ARMORED
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CARS AND A COMMANDO (INFANTRY) UNIT TO LOCATION JUST SOUTH OF NEW ROAD UNDER CONSTRUCTION. SPECIAL COMMUNICATIONS HAVE BEEN SET UP BETWEEN THIS FORCE AND KUWAITI MILITARY COMMAND HQ AT JAIWAN. DEPLOYMENT ALREADY UNDERWAY. SECOND PART OF PLAN IS TO EXERCISE JAHRA AND YARMUK BRIGADES (RECENTLY RETURNED FROM EGYPT AND SYRIA) IN NORTHERN AREA OF KUWAIT.

D. PLATTS-MARTIN'S SUMMATION WAS THAT KUWAITIS FEEL THEY

ARE BEING NUDGED AND HARRASSED BY IRAQIS ALONG BORDER AND THEY DO NOT KNOW EXACTLY HOW TO REACT. KUWAITI MILITARY CONSIDERS GOK "POLITICIANS" ARE "SOFT" IN FACE OF IRAQI PROVOCATIONS AND WANT SOMEHOW TO TEACH IRAQIS A LESSON. SO FAR MILITARY IS THUMBING ITS NOSE BACK AT IRAQIS BY SUCH MEANS AS LAYING DOWN BULLDOZED TRACK AS LINE OF NO RETREAT, HELICOPTER FLIGHTS IN BORDER AREA ANSWERING THOSE OF IRAQIS, AND TROOP DEPLOYMENTS AND EXERCISES. KUWAITI NATIONALIST EMOTIONALISM, COUPLED WITH MILITARY INESPERIENCE AND INCOMPETENCE IN HIGH COMMAND LEVELS, PLATTS-MARTIN BELIEVES, ENHANCE THE DANGER THAT KUWAITIS MAY OVER REACT AT SOME POINT. ATMOSPHERE ON FRONTIER, HE ADDED, IS REMINISCENT OF PERIOD BEFORE SAMITAH INDICENT IN SPRING OF 1973. (EMBASSY DOD REP HAS CONFIRMED THAT UNUSUAL MILITARY ACTIVITIES AND MOVEMENTS ARE OCCURING).

3. ON POLITICAL SIDE, AS AMB LAMB AND I DISCUSSED, SITUATION WOULD OBVIOUSLY ASSUME MUCH LARGER DIMENSION IF IRANIANS BECAME ACTIVELY CONCERNED. WE AGREED TO KEEP IRANIAN COLLEAGUE HERE INFORMED WITH OBJECT OF ENCOURAGING HIM SEND IN LEVEL HEADED AND ACCURATE REPORTS TO TEHRAN. WE ALSO CONCLUDED CURRENT SITUATION AT HEAD OF GULF IS CALM AT PRESENT BUT CONTAINS UNHEALTHY ASPECTS THAT DESERVE CONTINUED CLOSE WATCH.
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